DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 895 CG 007 071

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TITLE Helping Relationships Across Professions: A New Look at Social Work.
PUB DATE Jun 71
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Helping Relationship; *Professional Personnel; Professional Training; Research Projects; *Role Theory; *Social Services; *Social Workers
IDENTIFIERS Carkhuff Bereson Model

ABSTRACT

As a member of a significant helping profession, the Social Worker is engaged in relationship activities not unlike those of the counselor of guidance worker. The present study set out to investigate certain performance aspects demonstrated to be important to the level of relationship functioning in the social work field. Specifically the research project set out to examine three different but related areas of social worker functioning: (1) Employing the Carkhuff-Bereson model of helper effectiveness, five population samples were assessed on the 'helper' index of discrimination and communication; (2) An experimental study involving Social Service trainees was designed to investigate several dimensions hypothesized to relate to variables for counselor effectiveness; and (3) The third phase of the investigation was to determine the efficacy of incorporating a Human Relations Training program as an integral part of their regular training program in an attempt to increase level of functioning in the variables outlined above. (Author/CJ)

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HELPING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS PROFESSIONS

A NEW LOOK AT SOCIAL WORK

INTRODUCTION

Until recently we in the helping professions have assumed that the more educated we are (years of professional training) the more facilative we are when dealing with other people. Recently that assumption has been questioned particularly in the field of counselor functioning. Indeed there is some evidence to suggest that relationship effectiveness is inversely proportional to years of training(Truax & Carkhuff, 1967. Since the evidence is equivocal we must seriously address ourselves to the role of such variables as training, experience and sex as these variables relate directly to the helping relationship. These questions are part of a comprehensive study presently being conducted in the Province of Alberta.

At present, the Alberta Colleges Commission is sponsoring a major research project designed to explore Alberta's various existing social work programs. The project has been divided into seven separate, but related studies and it is the intent of the present paper to focus on one of them. Before doing so, however, the author would like to bring perspective to his study byfirst considering the overall project, then narrowing the discussion to the author's contribution to the larger study.

A. MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Direction

The greater research project was designed under the direction of Drs. J. G. Paterson, D. D. Sawatsky, of the Department of Educational Psychology at the

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University of Alberta and Dr. F. Oliva of the Department of Educational Ad--ministration at the University of Calgary.

Purpose

Purpose of the study was to answer som e of the specific questions posed by the Director of Instructional Services, Alberta Colleges Commission (coordinating body of the junior colleges in the Province of Alberta).

The project was initiated by the Alberta Colleges Commission contacting interested professionals about the kind of questions a study should examine. The groups involved were: Social Welfare Department, Social Workers, Alberta Association of S. W.'s and the Department of Social Welfare - University of Calgary. They posed the relevant questions then the Colleges Commission sought a group outside the field of social work to do the research.

Seven distinct studies have been incorporated into organizational frame work designed to evaluate and describe present social work programs within the province, as well as to make some projections about the future.

Background of Research Personnel

The research project into the role and function of social workers within the province, was given to a team of researchers whose background includes training in counseling psychology, school psychology and research methodology at the graduate level. Also several of the researchers have been or are working part time in clinical or agency settings where work involvement with social services personnel is frequent.

The researchers undertaking this study were selected because it was felt that their training and background qualified them as competent to address themselves to the questions being asked by the Colleges Commission.

Emphasis on the possible crucial variables contributing to the quality of the social worker - client relationship have until now largely been ignored. Included in the research team are two persons from social work background - one M. S. W. caseworker and a social services instructor - in order to give the team the accurate perspective necessary. The team consists of 3 Ph. D. candidate students and 3 Master level students from the Universities of Alberta and Calgary. Advisory personnel from Alberta Social Workers Association and Department of Social Welfare, University of Calgary, have assisted as studies progress.

I. Present Status and Projected Needs of Social Services in Alberta.

Studies

a. a follow up of graduates from the University Social Welfare Programs as well as from training programs in other Alberta Institutions (Master's Student).

b. an investigation of personnel in social work agencies in the province with agency predictions for future needs (Master's Student).

c. projected social welfare needs in the province of Alberta (Master's Student).

II. Effectiveness of Present Training Programs in Terms of Real Client Needs.

a. An estimate of the degree to which trainees and field workers show evidence of effective relationships with clients. (Doctoral Student)

b. A pre-post study measuring gains in accuracy and complexity of perception of others at two points in time in a regular technical institute or college social service program. (Doctoral Student)

c. Measurement of client perceptions of effectiveness of social workers with varying degrees of training and experience and irrational belief structure. (Doctoral Student)

Given this brief overview of the larger research goals and the comprehensive nature of the project in terms of the seven related studies; the emphasis from this point on will be firected toward those studies which center upon the helper - helpee as part of the helping relationship between the social worker and client. This latter emphasis is the most valuable in terms of the behavior variables being investigated as well as the relatedness and generalization potentional across helping professions who hold as one major objective - effective facilitative relationship with clients in a therapeutic or quasi-therapeutic context.

Any interviewer - interviewee relationship is more constructive when the interviewer is functioning at high levels of facilitation, than when the interviewer is functioning at low levels of facilitation (Carkhuff, 1969 and Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967).

Regarding the role of the Social Worker it is agreed that a significant proportion of the total social work job activity is spent in face-to-face relationships. Further within that face-to-face relationship, the emphasis is placed upon dynamic interaction of attitudes and emotions between social worker and client (Biestek, 1957). Although part of the social work role involves clerical, placement, administrative type duties (coordinator activities),a significant aspect of the role of the caseworker is an attempt to change the client's behavior (relationship activity) "with the purpose of helping the client achieve a better adjustment between himself and his environment" (p. 1, Biestek, 1957).

This can be done in one of two ways:

a) by showing that the social worker attempts to meet the emotional needs of the client.

b) by showing that the social worker attempts to modify the behavior of the client.

From investigation of the related literature, we can assume then, that social workers who function at high levels of facilitation (discrimination and communication) will better meet the goals outlines in the role objectives, specified by Biestek (1957) and Hamilton (1969) then social workers functioning at low levels.

Since investigation into the social workers client relationship, vis-a-vis helper level of functions is not unlike the relationship and therapist variables has been given considerable considerable scrutiny within the field of counselor-client relationship effectiveness, it was considered valuable to conduct research of this kind (looking at level of functioning on discrimination and communication and type of training and years of experience) for the following reasons:

a) extending the employment of area specific instruments into a related helping profession area so that meaningful differences in performance across professions can be better understood by both professions.

b) determining the differential functioning (if any) of social workers across i type of training

ii years of experience

iii sex

c) drawing implications from such a study to the areas of counseling and educational, clinical, etc. institutions.

d) providing relevant data and expanding the knowledge in the social services as they relate to the relationship of the social worker.

e) to obtain more evidence pertaining to the relationship between discrimination and communication.

Although all the data is not yet in I feel that it is important to outline some of the trends that up until now have been indicated. It is acknowledged that the trends being observed to date may not be the same when all the data is in, therefore, some of you may not wish to stay, as the main focus is on the procedure and design of the study rather than the results at this point.

It cannot easily be disputed that the interpersonal relationship between helper and helpee is important to the extent that it relates or leads to therapeutic or constructive change, whether the area is defined as psychotherapy, counseling, psychiatry or social worker. The next question that would follow then is what are the behavioral variables which appear to add or subtract from the facilitative nature of this "relationship"?

Existing research into the variables of the relationship is greatly lacking (Paul, 1967). The criticism echoed vis-a-vis research into the helper - helpee dyad are shared strongly by the field of social work and counseling alike.

Halmos (1966) in a rather extensive comparative study in the theory and practice of social casework and psycho-therapy points out that all "counsellors" i. e. psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, social workers and counselors are reluctant to attend to the issue of investigation in terms of evidence of success.

Traditionally research in the areas of psychiatry, counseling and social work has focused on the client variable, mode or orientation of treatment. Until recently the therapist variable, in terms of therapist specific behaviors, has been relatively ignored. (Spilken, 1969).

Recently there has been a stress to examine the neglected specific therapist behaviors - (Halmos, 1966; Paul, 1967; Truax, 1967; Spilken, 1969, etc.) To the

knowledge the present researcher no specific examination of therapist under, individual behaviors in social work has been conducted to this time employing the instrument developed by Carlehuff which assess discrimination and communication skills of the therapist. It is the contention of general researchers (Spilken, Halmos and Truax) in the field of both counseling, psychiatry and social work that in focusing on the relationship objectives and processes, the distinctions between various professions seem less obvious and made of investigation within the areas more similar.

Halmos (1966) refers to the therapist behaviors under question as the "other ingredient" in counseling and social work and notes that the non-treatment variables provided by the helper within the relationship have beenpreviously previously ignored and is a necessary requisite for the establishment of facilitative counselor - client relationship.

Plowman (1967) in addressing himself directly to the general area of social work practice and research concludes that there exists a poverty of evidence and comparatively poor quality research into the caseworker variable. Plowman continues: "in proposing a methodology ignored in research into social work, is the characteristic of the caseworker (p. 13, 1967).

Spilken (1969) looked across 3 helping professions (psychotherapists, social workers and psychiatrists) to investigate therapist variables perceived to be crucial to the therapeutic relationship and process. He found that studies in the past were limited by the fact that they focused on a limited view of the therapists personality or else described characteristics in global terms, thereby failing to identify the various described elements inherent in the general categories (p. 317). Empathic understanding and communication of the same was

clearly the most preferred of the variables for the six groupings of therapists.

Thus it is with this theoretical and research (or lack of) background that contributed to the formulation of the following study which centres on differential modes of response of the helper to various client statements across professional groupings considering sex of helper, levels of training, and experience.

The authors research project was designed to examine the relationship of training and experience as predictive variables of helper relationship effectiveness, which is particularly important to all helping professions, especially counselling and social work. Also the following from the study, it is anticipated that relevant information vis-a-vis the effieiency of lay or non-professional personnel with the responsible position of helper in the relationship sense. Thence the relevance of the study is primarily two fold:

a) the counseling discipline at both the theoretical and the practioner level

b) the field of social work in terms of differential levels of functioning on specific helper facilitative scales.

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